1;Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
AX5 Vedda AX5

227
411
186
64
614
582
262
235
113

Fig. 13. Vedda bow and harpoon × 1/10.
Iron harpoon head × 1/3.

fig. 2, while Mr Storey's book contains an excellent photograph of these people spearing fish[1].

The length of the Vedda bow and harpoon shaft shown in fig. 13 are 208 cm. and 220 cm. respectively. The bow is an extremely powerful weapon, its diameter at its thickest part being about 3·3 cm.

In spite of the perfectly obvious fact that the majority of the Veddas are more Tamil than Vedda the old Vedda pride of blood survives and some of the older Veddas denied that they intermarried with Tamils.

Children of marriages in which the *waruge* of the contracting parties were known took their father's *waruge*, but it seemed to be a matter of no account whether or no individuals of the same *waruge* intermarried.

Everyone avoids eating fowl and all our informants both male and female denied that they ever ate it, though often suggesting that others might do so. On the other hand, one informant who bred fowls for sale summed the matter up with an emphatic "Veddas don't eat fowls." No reason was given for this abstinence but all agreed that their ancestors had not eaten fowl, though the majority of our informants admitted that they would breed fowls for sale and kill and prepare fowls for others to eat. Beef was said to be generally avoided though it was not

[1] *Hunting and Shooting in Ceylon*, London, 1907, p. 332.

5: Spittel D-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX5 Vedda AX5

Vela was an interesting little chap and, unlike the others, had always something to say for himself. He entertained us with charms, pleasing lullabies, and songs of rock and stream demons that came as fast as *na* leaves shaken by the wind, in the guise of bears, their mouths adrip with human blood. These he sang despite warnings from the others who reminded him that he had sucked a chicken bone, which was a dangerous thing to do before invoking devils lest it invite their anger.

Coming to a pool, brown with decaying leaves, we asked if the water was good. "Very good," said a Vedda, adding the epicurean touch, "Those fallen flowers floating there make the water sweet; they are the flowers that give good honey."

It was high noon when Veddas left us to go in search of food. But Vela lingered to tell us of the oppression of the local headman. Did they but catch a young deer or pea-chick that came their way they were prosecuted. The visiting apothecary too was bad; he gave them no medicines except for gifts of honey or meat; and the poor fellows had little enough for themselves.

Having visited a cave containing the battered remains of an old Buddha, we continued our circuit of the rock; and after a walk of an hour and a half under a burning sky, came to the Veddas of the *Kudda Ulpotha*. These had no huts of any sort, but merely sat grouped in families under various trees. It was the season of the *kong* fruit, of which there was plenty about. Women were boiling down the luscious pulp with which to make cakes, or extracting from the seeds an oil said to be good for sores and wounds. Very fond of the fruit they all were; it had been their only sustenance for days. One little urchin, his mouth be-ringed with parangi ulcers, was licking clean a coconut shell containing the acrid juice, with a relish worthy of a tastier dish.

The patriarch of the settlement, Naida, and his wife were typical Veddas; but here again most of the others showed Tamil admixture. One man had a large scar across his face. The manner he came by it illustrates well the aggressiveness of the little Ceylon sloth-bear. When out collecting honey he saw a she-bear and her cub. Realizing the certain disaster of such an encounter he cautiously climbed a tree; but in doing so snapped a twig and gave himself away. With a series of blood-curdling cries she charged him, and clambering up the tree, bit and clawed him severely. A large flap was torn from his face. This his father sewed up with a thorn and fibre, and doctored with a result that might have done credit to any surgeon. Living as they invariably do in the neighbourhood of rocks, and having kindred tastes in honey, yams, and fruit, the Veddas and bears often encounter each other, as the ugly scars on many of the men testify.

As, footsore and tired, we rounded the southern end of the rock towards evening, we met parties of Veddas returning with basketfuls of *kong* fruit. One youth was up a tree making the jungle ring to his song as he beat down the berries. As it darkened we reached Manampitiya, but not before we had worried a blind old owl that had descended to a streamlet to quench its thirst.

It is hard to forget that first experience of the Veddas in their homes: those voices in the jungle, that sight of their huts among the trees, and of their women roasting dainty little flowers for food.

5: Spittel D-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX5 Vedda AX5

were loath to purchase their intimacy with gifts. Time enough for that, when we had won them over by less humiliating means. Besides, these Veddas were evidently spoilt, and we wished to show them they were not the important personages they imagined themselves to be.

"We are going then," said Handuna. It was now our turn for dejection. Was it for such an ungracious issue we had travelled so far?

I had a last card, having brought some neosalvarsan, a sovereign remedy for yaws so rife among these people. The offer was received with indifference. There was only one case among them, they said, and the patient was too ill to come. This being just what we wanted, I offered to visit them the next morning.

"You cannot come where we live unless we allow you," said the irrepressible Kaira. "And we won't show you our caves or anything, unless you give us presents."

Sick with exasperation and disgust at the behaviour of these impossible children, I told them they could take our offer or leave it as they chose, and turned to other work. The result was a grudging acquiescence; and, leaving a guide behind, they went away.

A word of explanation regarding the sophistication of a people so remote. They were in fact about the purest-blooded Veddas extant; indeed, it was to this very circumstance they owed their disappointing behaviour; for it had attracted Seligamann among them. What that implied may well be imagined. To obtain the valuable sociological information with which his book abounds, he had gained the confidence of these folk with scrupulous consideration and kindness, showering on them gifts of all kinds. Moreover, the patient investigation of the most intimate details of their lives by such a man, heightened their self-esteem. Of this we had an amusing illustration. I was obliged to admonish a group of Sinhalese that embarrassed us with their attentions. A Vedda sidled up and, tapping me familiarly on the shoulder, whispered, "Those people don't like us, they are jealous of us. We and you gentlemen are one; they are different!"

To dismiss these Veddas as spoilt uninteresting folk would imply failure to discern their innate simplicity, beneath the veneer of pose and importunity, for which contact with an indulgent stranger had been responsible. In their homes they still are as artless as their forbears were before ever white man set foot on these shores.

We were out hunting early that afternoon, when a sudden snapping sound arrested our attention. The Vedda we were with listened a few seconds. "Catching *talagoyas*," (monitor-lizards), he said laconically. The excited barking of a dog and rebuking human voices soon confirmed his conjecture. Going up, we found two men, one of whom carried a large quivering monitor just killed; while two dogs, still spirited with the chase, danced round their victim and growled and snapped at us. One of the men now set about to disjoint the quarry's tail at the middle, leaving it connected only by a tag of sinew; then, slitting the submandibular web, he rove the tail through till it locked at the division, making the reptile eat its own tail as it were, and carried it neatly in a loop. The monitor is best hunted at high noon; after four in the afternoon it takes to trees and holes.

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A Vedda woman, who had preserved bunches of the fruit in a pot of honey, was able to provide them; and so earned the name of her tribe. The Unapana *waruge*, like all the other *waruges*, also owed its name to a woman. She, when a king was out hunting in a parched land, supplied him with drink by squeezing out her dew-drenched cloth! Thirst apparently destroys the fastidiousness even of kings. The Rugam *waruge* derives from an incident connected with the building of the bund of Rugam tank. After its completion, this earth-work used to break down with the yearly floods despite all efforts at consolidating it. The Sinhalese king of the time had a vision one night telling him, that if a pregnant woman were built alive into the bund, it would ever after remain intact. A Vedda woman was sacrificed, and her clan received the name of the tank. The Uru *waruge* was called after a child-birth in a pig's hole; the Tala *waruge* after such an episode in a *talawa* or glade; the Nabudena, Kiribo and Embille *waruges* after similar occurrences under *nabudu*, *kiribo* and *embille* trees respectively. The Veddas being nomadic these incidents are common. Gama, as we have seen, owed his name to being born on the way (*gamana*).

Though shy and retiring by nature, Veddas are always to be found in the vicinity of Sinhalese settlements; and that, for good reasons: Ceylon being but a small island, its remotest forests are easily accessible; more so in recent years when roads and railways have spread out their tentacles everywhere claiming from Nature her wildest solitudes. Any jungles that have not yet fallen a prey to planting enterprise owe it largely to their aridity and unhealthiness. Nowhere is there a spot in Ceylon to-day that is not within ten miles of some habitation. Besides, it is to the mutual advantage of both Vedda and Sinhalese to be near each other, for if the one can supply grain in days of dearth, the other can repay tenfold with flesh and honey in season.

The Sinhalese affect an indulgent tolerance towards the Veddas, and aver them to be more of a nuisance than a help, saying the Veddas have to be kept alive when starving. The Vedda, on the other hand, will tell you that he is never in want; for the jungle, even in its worst months, is never totally devoid of food for him who knows where to find it: *kanava* and *kotha* combs are always there, and meat and yams of one sort or another. It must however be admitted, that the Veddas have a great partiality for what the unaided jungle cannot give—*kurrukkan*, maize, and tobacco. Rice is a welcome occasional meal to the Vedda, but he cannot do without *kurrukkan*; it takes much rice to fill the stomach, whereas a *kurrukkan* cake is like a stone, and even a small piece satisfies.

A Sinhalese told us that if you gave a Vedda much by way of barter, he would never come near you again, but would go where the giving was more niggardly. (What a salve to the conscience!) We asked a Vedda if this was true: "Much they give us," he said; "though they are always ready enough to take all we give them—and more."

In the bottom of their hearts the Veddas have a suspicion that the Sinhalese wish them no good. A Vedda, when asked how it was that their numbers had dwindled so, said, with simple faith, that it was due to the Sinhalese having killed out his people, by giving them charmed tobacco to eat, so that they died of disease or misadventure. The recent influenza epidemic fairly wiped out the last of the Veddas.